



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Ravenswood

and/or common same

## 2. Location

street &amp; number Wilson Pike N/A — not for publication

city, town Brentwood —X— vicinity of

state TN code 047 county Williamson code 187

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Reese L. Smith, Jr.

street &amp; number Ravenswood Farm, Rt. 5 Wilson Pike

city, town Franklin N/A — vicinity of state Tennessee 37064

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Williamson County Courthouse

street &amp; number Public Square

city, town Franklin state TN 37064

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate N/A N/A ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

## 7. Description

### Condition

☒ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Ravenswood, built in 1825, is a two-story ell-shaped brick house located on Wilson Pike in Williamson County, near Brentwood. The house exhibits a combination of Federal and Greek Revival style characteristics. Stepped chimney gables, a plain frieze, low gable roof, three-bay facade, central double-leaf entrance with sidelights and tracery transom, tripart windows with bull's eye stone lintels, stone quoins, and a one-story classical verandah are its most prominent features. The house and its two original brick slave houses, detached brick kitchen, and a log and frame barn are situated on a gentle, long slope of land, midway between the low-lying road in front and a steep hilltop behind. A long gravel driveway, lined with mature shade trees leads up the sloping hillside to an oval-shaped driveway in front of the house. Surrounding the house and its outbuildings are acres of farmland with scattered woods and tree-lined fence rows around sectioned fields. Ravenswood retains a high degree of integrity, both architecturally and in its rural plantation setting.

Ravenswood is two stories in height and ell-shaped; a one-story wing adjoins the rear elevation of the ell. The three-bay facade of the house features contrasting stone quoins at the corners and around the doorway. A stone stringcourse divides the two stories. Asphalt shingles cover the house's low gable roof. The wide tripart windows have 6/6 lights and bull's eye corner block stone lintels. Upper story windows have double louvered shutters. The central double-leaf doorway has tracery side lights and transom. A one-story verandah across the facade has a central pediment, modillioned frieze, square Doric columns, a wood balustrade, and stone foundation. Windows of the side elevations have 6/6 lights and stone lintels with bull's eye corner blocks. A one-story Victorian period porch with spindle frieze, turned posts and balustrade is located on the north side elevation of the ell. The verandah across the inside of the ell has been enclosed with screens; the verandah across the south side of the one-story wing has been enclosed with weatherboard. These enclosures, and a one-story frame room added to the west or rear elevation of the wing ca. 1960s, are the only serious changes made to the house. They however do not greatly affect the integrity of Ravenswood because they are exterior additions that could be removed.

The Federal period interior of Ravenswood remains practically unaltered. Original staircases, doors, moldings, mantels, and floors remain intact and in good condition. The central hall spiral staircase and two marble mantels are extremely fine interior examples of craftsmanship.

Significant outbuildings included within the nominated boundaries are the original detached brick kitchen/servants quarters, two brick slave houses and a log and frame barn. The remarkably unaltered kitchen is two-stories, gable-roofed and has a large gable end brick chimney. The two slave houses, also little-altered, are one and a half story with a gable end chimney, a single-leaf door on the south side and a rectangular window on the north side each. The log and frame barn has a gable roof and is covered with vertical boards. Other outbuildings, non-contributing to the significance of Ravenswood, are a mid-twentieth century carport and two shed-type frame storage buildings.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1825 Builder/Architect Unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Ravenswood (sometimes known as Ravenwood) is nominated under National Register criteria B and C for its historical and architectural significance to Williamson County. The house derives significance from association with its builder, James Hazard Wilson II, a Middle Tennessee baron of big business whose worth was valued at two million dollars in slaves, southern plantations, and Mississippi River steamboats. Architecturally, the house is significant as an outstanding, unique example of Federal period architecture in Williamson County and Middle Tennessee.

James Hazard Wilson (1763-1838) was the son of Thomas and Katie Carson Wilson who settled in the Brentwood area of Williamson County, building substantial log homes in the early 1800s. He was born in County Fermanagh, Ireland and also emigrated to America where he married Ruth Davidson of North Carolina. From their marriage came nine children who became prominent socially and in many phases of public life. Two of their most prominent sons were Samuel D. Wilson (1796-1854), who married Martha Davis and served as one of the first secretaries of the State of Texas, and James Hazard Wilson II (1800-1869) who built Ravenswood.

James Hazard Wilson II was a business magnate of the South whose holdings included a fortune in lands, stocks, servants, cash, large houses and plantations, and a lucrative steamboat line on the Mississippi. He married his young cousin Emeline (1808-1860), the daughter of Samuel and Martha Davidson Wilson. Sam Houston was best man at the wedding ceremony on March 21, 1821. When they built Ravenswood in 1825 they named their home after Houston, his friend whom the Indians called Co-lon-neh, the Raven.

Although Ravenswood was one of many houses in the deep South owned by Wilson, it was the house he built for raising his family of nine children. The house witnessed a series of tragedies that eventually resulted in a broken spirit of Wilson and downfall of his great fortune. Of the nine children, five died in as many years. Samuel, his favorite by his own admission, suddenly passed away in 1851 at the age of 28. Their only daughter, Emelin died in 1852. Jason died at Ravenswood in 1854 and George Washington three months later at the Bon Air Spa in White County, Tennessee. In 1856, fourteen year old Walter, deaf and dumb since infancy from scarlet fever, was killed when a gun accidentally discharged. The crowning blow came in 1860 when his wife Emeline died.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Wilson spent \$10,000 outfitting an entire company and otherwise aiding the Confederate cause. When his son, James H. Wilson III left home for the army, Wilson invited his son's wife, five sisters, and daughter to stay at Ravenswood while he was away at his more southern plantations. The War and Reconstruction had a devastating effect on Wilson's vast holdings. Broken in health and spirit, he died in 1869 at Century Oak, the home of a son named Frank. Even after his great losses, Wilson left a considerable estate to his three surviving sons, Robert, Hazard, and Richard.

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Ravenswood passed from the Wilson family to a Dr. Robertson, then to the Tullos Family, next to Louis West, and then to John D. Lewis. Lewis owned the property for about 20 years. Mr. and Mrs. Reese Smith, the current owners, purchased the house and accompanying 480 acres of land 18 years ago from Lewis.

Architecturally, Ravenswood is an outstanding and unique example of Federal period architecture in Williamson County and Middle Tennessee. The large two-story brick house is constructed with extremely fine craftsmanship and is unusual for a Federal period house in that it features stone quoins on the facade corners and around the central entranceway and combines features that usually characterize the Federal or the Greek Revival styles in Tennessee. Typically Federal are the three-bay symmetrical facade, stepped chimney gables, and plain frieze under the low gable roof of the facade. More common to Greek Revival style houses are the central entrance with side lights and transom and the tripart windows with bull's eye stone lintels. In addition to the house's architectural significance, Ravenswood still retains two original brick slave houses, the original detached brick kitchen, a log and frame barn, and its rural plantation setting to nearly completely demonstrate the character of a mid-nineteenth century plantation in Middle Tennessee.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Bowman, Virginia McDaniel. Historic Williamson County Old Homes and Sites,  
Nashville: Blue and Gray Press, 1971.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 52

Quadrangle name Franklin, Tennessee

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	1 6	5 2 1 0 4 0	3 9 7 7 9 8 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1 6	5 2 0 4 6 0	3 9 7 7 5 4 0
E			
G			

B	1 6	5 2 1 0 0 0	3 9 7 7 6 1 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D	1 6	5 2 0 3 2 0	3 9 7 7 8 5 0
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Page

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
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state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Shain T. Dennison, Architectural Historian

organization Tennessee Historical Commission

date 1-17-83

street & number 701 Broadway

telephone 615/742-6716

city or town Nashville

state Tennessee

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

*Herbert L. Hayden*

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 5/16/83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

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National Park Service

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The boundaries of Ravenswood are outlined in red on the accompanying Williamson County property assessment map #61 drawn at a scale of 400' to the inch. The boundaries begin at a point 550' north of the entrance driveway at the east property line which fronts on Wilson Pike. From this point the boundary extends west 2400', following the line of an existing fence to form the northern boundary. Here, the boundary line turns southeasterly afor 245' along the edge of a tree line. It then turns east and extends along a fence line for 280'. From there the line runs south along a fence row for 850'. From there the boundary line follows the south fence row which defines the south property line of Ravenswood, for 1800' to form the south boundary. These boundaries were selected to include the house, significant outbuildings, and enough land to maintain the historic plantation setting of Ravenswood.

## RAVENSWOOD

Ravenswood was built in 1825 by James Hazard Wilson II. It was named for Sam Houston, who served as governor of both Tennessee and Texas. He was a friend of the Wilsons and served as best man in the wedding of James Hazard Wilson II. Prior to the Civil War the Wilsons owned a number of plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana. It is said that they would bring their slaves from the Deep South to Ravenswood in the summer and take them back in the winter so that they could enjoy a better climate both seasons. During the Civil War, Wilson spent \$10,000 outfitting an entire company in the Confederate Army. Today the house, the brick kitchen and row of brick slave houses are in a beautiful state of preservation. It is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Reese Smith.

## Brentwood Brochure

also see:  
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...the house  
...the house



## RAVENWOOD

Ravenwood is located some seven miles south of Brentwood, on the west side of the Wilson Pk. It was built in the early 1800's by Col. James Hazard Wilson, Sr. This is another classic example of the lovely and gracious homes that were erected in the pre-Civil War days. Another that has passed through several hands, it is now owned by Mr. and Mrs. Reese Smith.

Col. Wilson was a very prosperous man of whom it was said "he could make money chained to a rock." He had other holdings in Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. He owned a great number of slaves. Each summer he would bring 50 or so of these people by boat to spend several months at Ravenwood and "recruit" their health. He also equipped and entire company of the Confederate Army at his own expense.

## REFERENCES:

Rosalie C. Batson

1841  
The John Hamilton Crockett place was  
Dan Roberts, Jr. in September of 1864  
state of preservation, it is owned today  
A. A. Colbrook.  
Crockett land.  
home, shadowed by an immense Holly Tree, John  
intermarried with the Crockett's time and again a  
lacked walls of the old Savers house can be seen. The house  
standing in the cemetery and looking  
again, who died while on a visit to her daughter,  
Elizabeth Montgomery Crockett, of the Crockett family.  
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## Ravenwood

Substantial log cabin beside  
Valley ground between w  
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community off the present Wilson Pike. Here they built log cabins for shelter until a more substantial dwelling could be erected. As soon as bricks could be burned, John H. Crockett built two brick houses. One has been torn away; the other, with a large frame addition remains a landmark on Ozburn Road. The early children learned their numbers by counting the axmarks on the timbers in the oldest part of this house. Around 1855, when the frame portion was added a double row of cedars was planted to line the front walk. In their maturity they made an impressive site along with other fine shade trees in the wide yard which sloped to the road.

Among the Crockett's twelve children was a daughter, Jane, (1816-1887) who married Thomas Hilary Roberts (1812-1886) and continued to live at the homeplace. Their daughter Bettie, later Mrs. Frank Ogilvie, was the family chronicler who preserved many interesting facts of the past. She remembered hearing her Crockett grandmothers talking of the old days in Virginia. One story they told which so impressed her youthful mind was that of a young mother who, with her baby in her arms, was walking through the woods to a neighbor's house. Suddenly a bear reared up in the path and snatched at the infant. The mother's shrieks attracted the attention of woodcutters nearby who rushed to her assistance, but since they were on foot they were no match for the beast which went crashing through the underbrush. Weeping bitterly, the girl retraced her footsteps homeward and laid her poor baby in one of the Crockett ladies' lap. As she removed the little cap, Mrs. Crockett found its brains oozing from the fatal slash of the bear's paw. Many other happenings of pioneer days Mrs. Ogilvie wrote down for posterity.

Another of Thomas Hilary and Jane C. Roberts's children, Daniel Hilary, married Miss Mamie Cayce whose memory is still cherished by many Franklin friends. Mr. and Mrs. Roberts moved to Franklin in 1919 and from then on the house was occupied by families who worked the land.

A fascinating story is connected with this house. On a stormy day in 1820 a stranger knocked at the door and asked shelter from the rain. When no introduction seemed forthcoming after he was invited in, John Crockett asked him his name. With some hesitation the guest glanced at the roiling skies and announced himself as Mr. Cloud. His horse was stabled and in the open-handed hospitality of that day he was persuaded to spend the night. He was an attractive, articulate man—rather nervous and apprehensive, but obviously a gentleman of culture and refinement. He amused the children with stories and talked with intelligence and perception to his hosts about affairs of the day.

When he mentioned leaving the family set up an outcry, and he agreed to remain temporarily to tutor the children for his board. In this capacity Mr. Cloud unconsciously revealed to the Crocketts a highly educated mind by his knowledge of the classics, higher mathematics, the sciences and languages. The days lengthened into months, then years and nothing more was said of his leaving. When his duties in the schoolroom lessened, he turned his hand to other interests. He was especially skilled in woodwork, and a cherry table, the legs of which he painstakingly carved with his pocketknife, is still in the



*One of two houses originally built by John H. Crockett*

family. The hole underneath the drawer was made by Yankees when they could not unlock it to steal the silver.

Mr. Cloud was a source of endless conversation in the neighborhood. He was kind, wise, and generous with his talents, but the secret he brought with him out of the storm their most delicate probing failed to penetrate. He never ventured further than a mile or so from the Crockett place; therefore, the most of their contact with him was in that environs. While John H. Crockett lived, he shielded his guest as much as possible saying he more than paid his way as teacher, friend, and advisor in his home.

Twenty-seven years after his arrival here Mr. Cloud died, beloved and honored by his adopted family who made no difference between him and their own blood. He was buried in the cemetery near the house where his tombstone revealed no more of him in death than he had in life. It reads simply "Mr. Cloud. Died 1847". Nearby are the stones of his benefactors, "John Crockett, Ja 15, 1777-1827" and "Nancy Crockett, Au 16, 1781-May 12, 1844." Also buried here is Nancy Crockett's mother, Elizabeth Montgomery Crockett, of Wythe County, Virginia, who died while on a visit to her daughter.

Standing in the cemetery and looking northwest, the brick walls of the old Sayers house can be seen. The Sayers intermarried with the Crocketts time and again and their home, shadowed by an immense holly tree, joins what was Crockett land.

The John Hamilton Crockett place was sold by Mrs. Dan Roberts, Jr. in September of 1964. In an excellent state of preservation, it is owned today by Mr. and Mrs. A. A. Colebrook.

## Ravenwood

Substantial log cabins beside bold springs in the Harpeth Valley around Brentwood were the first homes of the descendants of Thomas and Katie Carson Wilson when they came here in the early 1800s. Their son, James Hazard Wilson (1763-1838), was born in County Fermaugh, Ireland, but early emigrated to America where



*Ravenwood, home of James Hazard Wilson*

he married Ruth Davidson of North Carolina. From this union came nine children who allied themselves with the best blood in the state and became prominent in many phases of public life.

One son, Samuel D. Wilson (1796-1854), married Martha Davis and served as one of the first Secretaries of the State of Texas. Another son, James Hazard Wilson II (1800-1869), was a man of such ability and business acumen he needs to be ranked with the industrial magnates of this country. In his prime when the winds of fortune were blowing strong at his back, he boasted, "I could make money if I was chained to a rock." Since he was not thus encumbered, he made money hand over fist. In Tennessee alone he gave each of his sons a fortune in lands, stocks, servants, and cash, besides the homes he built for them along the old Wilson Turnpike.

His holdings in Tennessee were slight, however, compared with those in the more Southern states where he owned plantations and operated a lucrative steamboat line on the Mississippi. Mr. Wilson was also instrumental in building the suspension bridge in Nashville along with countless other business ventures. In his prime he was worth close to two million dollars.

James Wilson was a merciful and compassionate master to his hundreds of servants. It was his custom to bring fifty at the time by boat from the deep south to Tennessee where they could rest and benefit from the more healthful climate. Older residents on Wilson Pike recall hearing their parents tell of them coming down the road singing on their way to Ravenwood.

When James Hazard Wilson II married, he chose for his bride his little cousin Emeline (1808-1860), the daughter of Samuel and Martha Davidson Wilson. Sam Houston was best man at the wedding ceremony performed by Mr. McConnico on March 21, 1821. In 1825, when Mr. Wilson built his home he named it for Houston whom the

Indians affectionately called Co-lon-neh, the Raven.

Ravenwood rose on its vast acreage in a beautiful setting of forest trees and rural solitude. Tall ceilings, marble mantels, and a fine staircase—a feature of all the Wilson homes—characterized the interior. A brick kitchen sat right behind the house with a row of brick slave quarters stretching away to the west. The picturesque stone springhouse, ivy-covered and deep in the shade, is passed on the way to the house.

For years everything seemed to go James Wilson's way. He was a man of fine personal appearance who counted as his friends the most influential names in the South. He deeply loved his frail wife and was proud of their nine beautiful children. Then tragedy began to creep insidiously into his personal life. Of the nine children, five died in as many years. Samuel, his favorite by his own admission, died in 1851; the only little girl, Emeline, died in 1852; Jason died at Ravenwood in 1854 and George Washington three months later at the Bon Air Spa in White County, Tennessee. In 1856, fourteen year old Walter, deaf and dumb since infancy from scarlet fever, was killed when a gun accidentally discharged. In spite of his great handicap, the child was "spritely and intelligent" and was greatly beloved by his family.

The crowning blow came January 30, 1860, when the frail and lovely Emeline died, and it was with the greatest difficulty the sons could persuade their father to arrange for the funeral. She was buried in the Wilson cemetery near Century Oak, not the old cemetery at Ravenwood. Today, only one marker remains in the two large burial grounds, although in his will James H. Wilson stipulated that from three to six thousand dollars, and more if necessary, be spent for their care and that a rock wall be erected around the old burial site.

With the outbreak of war, Mr. Wilson spent \$10,000 outfitting an entire company and otherwise aiding the

## House and its owners share a kinship with history

---

arcella and Reese Smith.

Together they make a wonderful story. It is an upbeat story full of the American dream

realized.

It was a blind date that brought them together and as Marcella says, "A power greater than we are that helped us along the way."

"When we were first married, Reese worked for the Nashville Fire Department. Then he sold candy for the Curtis Candy Company for almost 10 years before he went into the construction business," Marcella adds.

"He built his first house on the weekends," Marcella said. "And when he was able to sell it at a profit, he built another one. It was honest hard work that brought him success."

Today Reese Smith Jr. is a major force in home construction and real estate development and is a substantial stockholder in the Nashville Sounds and several other baseball teams.

About 20 years ago the Smiths bought and restored one of Brentwood's oldest historical homes. From the moment they first saw Ravenswood, they said they both felt a kinship with its history. Marcella describes "a certain feel" that the house has for her and continues, "We both love history. I wanted an old house. Reese wanted a house with land."

Ravenswood had all this and more.

Ravenswood was built in 1825 by James Hazard Wilson II for his young wife Emeline. The Wilsons named their new home Ravenswood in honor of their good friend Sam Houston who was the best man in their wedding.

Today Marcella sees that Emeline still holds a place of honor in the front parlor of Ravenswood.

There her picture sits amid the

*Above right: Historic Ravenswood stands proudly against the spring skies. Below right: Marcella and Reese Smith share a love for their house and the history it represents*

comings and goings of the Smith family. One would guess that Emeline would be pleased with modern day Ravenswood.

Ravenswood is not a house enshrined and dusty with its past. Instead it is a real home alive with the present. Its spread of large, high-ceilinged rooms have been made warm and inviting. It was here that the Smith's three sons grew to maturity.

*We both love history. I wanted an old house. Reese wanted a house with land.*

*Marcella Smith*

Christmas is a favorite family time at Ravenswood. Together, three generations of Smiths go out to cut a huge cedar tree for the front hall. The tree always stands over 20-feet tall and is a family project from start to finish.

The Smith's holidays abound with family gatherings and are rich with traditional southern food. Marcella takes great pride in the quality of the food that she serves at these gatherings. Many of her recipes have been handed down from her grandmother's kitchen and are akin to the food that has been served at Ravenswood for countless generations.

Marcella and Reese Smith. At home in Brentwood, in a grand old house that sings with the laughter of their grandchildren. All together it does make a wonderful story.

*See recipes on page 40*

